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Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

The Trials of Aspiring Female Scientists in KSA

11. (SBU) During a recent lunch with PolOff, an appointed member of the Al-Ahsa municipal council who is also an American-educated professor of plant physiology fielded two phone calls from students. The first was from a female graduate student who needed help on some laboratory research she was conducting. After finishing a conversation that included many "insha'allahs," the professor explained, "I feel very sorry for her but I cannot give her the help she needs. We cannot work in the same lab, so I have to type up lab instructions in a memo for her to follow. She is not even allowed to use the lab at the university and has to use an inferior lab at nearby college for women. It is very difficult for her to work by herself, without guidance in-person." The second call was from a friend who wanted to relay the exciting news that his son had just received his visa to study in the U.S. There were far more "mabrooks" than "insha'allahs."

Dubai Ports World Issue Still Making Waves

12. (SBU) Walid Al-Zamil, the Zamil brother with strategic responsibility for the Bahrain operations of his family's business empire, told ConOffs recently that the public outcry in the U.S. against Dubai Ports World's planned takeover of operations at several U.S. ports had hit the Gulf's business community hard. "People are wondering if its racism, or just politics," he said. He also noted that the Free Trade Agreement between Bahrain and the U.S. was causing uncertainty in Bahrain's business community. "I think the government needs to do a better job explaining what it will mean," Al-Zamil said.

Journalist Comes Up Empty in Trip to EP

13. (SBU) An AP reporter who planned to research several stories on the Eastern Province (EP) recently came away empty-handed. This reporter, who had a visa to enter the Kingdom to cover the Jeddah Economic Forum (JEF), wanted to write on the Shi'a and on Aramco. However his editors nixed the Shi'a story as AP is seeking to open a bureau in Riyadh and did not wish to offend the SAG at this time. In

addition, the reporter was not given permission by the Ministry of Petroleum to visit Aramco, in spite of assurances to the contrary. A request to visit Aramco by a visiting Council on Foreign Relations fellow and author met the same end. (Note: All JEF visas expired on February 17, so it was easy for the Ministry to follow a "delay until too late" strategy. End note.)

Turning Away from the Public Sector?

14. (SBU) One oft-cited reason for Saudi unemployment is that young Saudis do not want to work in the private sector, preferring the security of a government office job. In talking with several promising young public and quasi-public sector employees recently, PolOff has heard different sentiments. Several of these young men expressed a desire to test their mettle in the private sector, sensing greater opportunities and greater rewards. "The government doesn't reward you for good work and doesn't encourage you to grow professionally," noted a young Dammam Municipality employee currently detailed to the Dammam Municipal Council. To the extent that the ambitions and motivation of these young men are widespread, their sentiments are a promising sign for private sector development in Saudi Arabia but also suggest that the government will need to reform its employment and incentive structures if it hopes to retain talent.

(APPROVED: KINCANNON)
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